

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 CIAE-00 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 IGA-01

OMB-01 TRSE-00 SY-05 A-01 OPR-02 EB-07 MC-02 /080 W

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R 240803Z SEP 75

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5338

SECDEF WASHDC

INFO DIA WASHDC/AH-3

CINCPAC

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

17 AD CC UDORN, TH

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 5740

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, MARR, LA, US

SUBJ: LAO MAP/MASF ASSETS AT UDORN: DISPOSITION OF
AIRCRAFT AND TRUCKS

REF: STATE 225029 (NOTAL)

1. WE EXPECT THAT LAO REACTION TO NON-RETURN OF MAP/MASF
AIRCRAFT AT UDORN, WHEN FACT FINALLY BECOMES KNOWN AND
SINKS IN, WILL BE AT LEAST AS LOUD IN PROPAGANDA TERMS AS
REACTION TO OUR WITHDRAWAL FROM PHASE II OF NAM NGUM PROJECT.
REACTION COULD BE STRONGER, SINCE AIRCRAFT WERE ONCE IN LAO
HANDS AND STILL REPRESENT SOURCE OF SPARE PARTS FOR OTHER
AIRCRAFT OF SAME TYPE STILL IN USE BY AVIATION ELEMENT OF LAO
NATIONAL ARMY (LNA), EVEN THOUGH SENSIBLE LAO MUST REALIZE
THAT -- FOR LACK OF ANY CONTINUING SUPPLY OF SPARE PARTS
AND BECAUSE OF FUEL CONSTRAINTS -- LNA COULD NOT HAVE KEPT
SUCH A LARGE NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT FLYING.

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2. WE CANNOT JUDGE WITH ANY CONFIDENCE WHETHER LAO REACTION WILL TAKE ANY MORE CONCRETE FORM, SUCH AS DEMONSTRATIONS AGAINST THAI AND U.S. EMBASSIES OR OUTRIGHT EXPULSION OF THIS EMBASSY. ON BALANCE, WE DOUBT THAT REACTION WOULD BE SO EXTREME AS EXPULSION OF EMBASSY, AND IN ANY CASE WE BELIEVE WE MUST TAKE THAT CHANCE. IT IS AS GOOD AN ISSUE AS ANY ON WHICH TO GO.

3. DOWN TO PRESENT, WE HAVE RECEIVED ONLY ORAL INQUIRIES (E.G., SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NATIONAL DEFENSE KHAMOUANE BOUPHA TO DATT) ABOUT DISPOSITION OF AIRCRAFT AT UDORN, WHERE-AS RTG HAS BEFORE IT A FORMAL DIPLOMATIC REQUEST FOR THEIR RETURN (BANGKOK 14527). THEREFORE, DEPENDING ON VIEWS OF BANGKOK AND WASHINGTON, WE BELIEVE OPTIMUM FORM OF NOTIFICATION WOULD BE SHORT, FORMAL RTG NOTE TO PGNU CONVEYING REFUSAL TO RETURN AIRCRAFT, WITHOUT FURTHER EXPLANATION. IF RTG WERE PRESSED BY LAO, THAI OFFICIALS COULD ADD ORAL EXPLANATION THAT USG HAD EXERCISED ITS REVERSIONARY RIGHTS TO AIRCRAFT AND THAT MATTER WAS THEREFORE ESSENTIALLY OUT OF THAI HANDS. THAI COULD AND SHOULD REMAIN SILENT ON DISPOSITION OF AIRCRAFT.

4. IF THAI SHOULD INSIST ON GREATER U.S. ASSUMPTION OF RESPONSIBILITY, HOWEVER, DEPT COULD CONVEY DECISION AND SUCCINCT EXPLANATION TO LAO CHARGE IN WASHINGTON.

5. ALTHOUGH IN THEORY IT MAKES SENSE TO GET DOWN ON PAPER OUR ARGUMENTS ABOUT REVERSIONARY RIGHTS AND HYPOTHETICAL USE OF AIRCRAFT (IF RETURNED TO LAOS) FOR PURPOSES OTHER THAN THOSE ORIGINALLY INTENDED, IN PRACTICE LAO COULD BE EXPECTED TO DISTORT OUR POSITION NO MATTER HOW FORMALLY OR OFFICIALLY PRESENTED. THEY ARE DOING THIS RIGHT NOW WITH RESPECT TO OUR DECISION ON NAM NGUM II: ACCUSING US, IN OFFICIAL STATEMENTS AND PROPAGANDA BROADCASTS, OF TRYING TO SABOTAGE THE ENTIRE PROJECT.

6. TIMING: WE BELIEVE IT MANDATORY THAT NO WORD OF OUR INTENDED POSITION REACH THE LAO UNTIL THE MAJOR 30TH-ANNIVERSARY-OF-INDEPENDENCE CEREMONIES PLANNED FOR OCTOBER 12 HAVE BEEN COMPLETED. ANNOUNCEMENT OF NON-RETURN OF AIRCRAFT AT ANY TIME BEFORE THAT DATE WOULD GIVE LAO COMMUNISTS A MAJOR ISSUE THAT COULD BE EXPLOITED IN OFFICIAL RALLY AND COULD EASILY MAKE CONFIDENTIAL

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THAI AND U.S. EMBASSIES TARGETS FOR "SPONTANEOUS" DEMONSTRATIONS BY LARGE CROWDS THAT WILL HAVE BEEN ASSEMBLED IN VIENTIANE. BY CONTRAST, OPTIMUM TIME FOR NOTIFICATION WOULD BE PERIOD BEGINNING LATE OCTOBER AND EXTENDING THROUGH MID-NOVEMBER, WHEN LAO -- EVEN THE COMMUNISTS -- WILL TO SOME EXTENT BE DIVERTED BY END OF BUDDHIST LENT (OCTOBER 20), BOAT RACES IN VIENTIANE (OCTOBER 21), AND THAT LUANG FAIR (NOVEMBER 4-18).

7. INVENTORY: LATEST INFORMATION WE HAVE, A COMPILATION BY MACTHAI AS OF AUGUST 1, AGREES WITH INVENTORY CONTAINED PARA 7 REFTEL EXCEPT WITH REGARD TO O-1'S. MACTHAI LISTING SHOWS NINE O-1F'S AND TWO O-1D'S, TOTAL ELEVEN AIRCRAFT, AND NO RPT NO O-1'S OF ANY OTHER MODEL, WHEREAS REFTEL CARRIES 20 O-1'S OF VARIOUS MODELS. THIS POINT SHOULD BE CLARIFIED.

8. REGARDING PARA 12 OF REFTEL, WE AGREE THAT TWO HELI-COPTERS FLOWN TO THAILAND BY DEFECTING RLAF PERSONNEL SHOULD BE LEFT AS A LAO-THAI ISSUE.

9. WE NOTE THAT PGNU ALSO ASKED RTG FOR RETURN OF CERTAIN TRUCKS, IN ADDITION TO AIRCRAFT (BANGKOK 14527). WE ASSUME THAT SAME REASONING WILL APPLY IN CASE OF TRUCKS AND TO ANY OTHER MAP/MASF ASSETS OUTSIDE OF LAOS TO WHICH PGNU MAY LAY CLAIM IN FUTURE. THEREFORE NOTIFICATION TO PGNU, WHATEVER FORM IT ULTIMATELY TAKES, SHOULD INCLUDE REFERENCE TO THE TRUCKS.
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